

CHAPTER VII.

THE FELLAH AS SOLDIER.

" MARCHED yesterday morning with three thousand five hundred towards Tokar. . . . On square being only threatened by small force of enemy, certainly less than a thousand strong, *Egyptian troops threw down their arms and ran, allowing themselves to be killed without slightest resistance.* More than two thousand killed. All material lost."

(Extract from General Baker's telegram, describing his defeat at El Teb, on the road to Tokar, on February 5, 1884.)

" The main body of the dervishes were fifty yards from our front line, and were extending to the right and left to envelop the position. The bulk of their force was directed against the line occupied by the 12th battalion, their attack being pushed home with their usual intrepidity and fearlessness. *The troops, however, stood their ground, and did not yield one inch throughout the line.*"

(Extract from Colonel Holled-Smith's report, describing his victory of Afaft, on the road to Tokar, on February 19, 1891.)

The same attacking enemy—adroit, sudden, and absolutely fearless; the same region of storm-swept desert and treacherous scrub, save that at El Teb the ground was comparatively open, while at Afaft the ambush-sheltering mimosa bushes, ten feet high, came close up to the line of march; the same human material on the side of Egypt—for there was no British soldier, officers excepted,

at Afafit, any more than at El Teb—yet how different the result! And this is no accidental contrast. I could parallel the misconduct of Baker's troops at El Teb by a dozen passages in the despatches recording the series of disgraceful defeats by which, in less than six months, the old Egyptian army lost the whole of the Eastern Sudan. And, similarly, the honourable record of the action at Afafit could be paralleled by many instances of steadiness and gallantry on the part of the new Egyptian army during the recent years of weary frontier warfare about Suakin and Wadi Halfa.

Why does the old army stand almost unequalled in history for cowardice and incapacity? Why has the new army, composed of very much the same elements, so soon achieved an honourable record? It is easy to answer that the difference arises from the fact that the new army has been created by British officers. But that answer only leads to a fresh question. By what magic is it that these men—average British officers, for the most part, and no more—have produced such remarkable results? How is it that they have changed the fighting character of a nation in so short a time? To whom is the credit principally due?

There are many who deserve to share the credit, and I believe that those gallant soldiers, who of late years have led the Egyptian forces to victories that have made a certain noise in the world, would be the first to admit that a large portion of it belongs to the men who, in the early days of the army, when everybody ridiculed the idea of the fellahin ever fighting, patiently laid the foundations of all the subsequent success. Perhaps the greatest of their merits was to have believed in the

possibility of a native Egyptian army at all. With the miserable collapse of Arabi's large host still fresh in everybody's memory, with reports of the disgraceful and unsoldierlike conduct of the Egyptian troops in the Sudan pouring in from every side, it required a good deal of courage and a good deal of imagination to picture the same class of men standing steady under fire, and even against cold steel, and becoming a terror to their enemies instead of simply being a scourge to the peaceful population whom they were intended to protect.

The problem of the military defence of Egypt, as it presented itself immediately after the British Occupation, was one of the most puzzling it is possible to conceive. One thing only was clear. The existing army was worse than useless. "The Egyptian army is disbanded," said the laconic and often-quoted decree of December 20, 1882; and so far at least everybody concerned was cordially unanimous. But what was to take its place? Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would certainly have answered that it could not be a new army composed of the same materials as the old one. It is greatly to the honour of Lord Dufferin that amid the wildest suggestions crowding in upon him, suggestions of Turkish battalions, of mixed European battalions, of every possible combination of riff-raff from all quarters of the globe, he adhered firmly to the principle of entrusting the defence of the country to its own inhabitants. Evidently, if the thing was possible, it was incomparably the best plan. The foreign civilians in Egypt were unruly enough; what would foreign janissaries be likely to be? But, sound as the principle was, its execution might have been very difficult if Lord Dufferin had not been able at that

moment to lay his hand upon a man, who not only possessed unquestionable military talents and a great experience of war, but was able to rise to the bold conception that even the despised fellah could be turned into a soldier. If it was true that ill-usage had made him a coward, might it not be possible that proper treatment would once more make him a man?

At any rate Sir Evelyn Wood, to whom the task of creating the new Egyptian army was entrusted, was prepared to try. And he had no difficulty in finding a sufficient number of British officers ready to assist him. I should think few of them ever regretted the enterprise. The Egyptian service, which was at first scoffed at as a career, has proved a road to advancement as good or better than any other in the whole wide field of British empire or influence. Among the twenty-six men, originally associated with Sir Evelyn Wood in his bold undertaking, are names which have subsequently become as well known as those of Grenfell, Chermeside, Hallam Parr, Watson, Wodehouse, Kitchener, and Rundle. British officers have done much for Egypt, but it is equally true that Egypt has done a good deal for them.

And the problem once boldly faced, its difficulties grew less appalling, as difficulties so faced are apt to do. It turned out that the material was not so very bad after all. No one can pretend that the Egyptian peasant, in his native condition, ranks very high as a fighting animal. Still, looked at with the view of making the best of him, he is not wanting in certain qualities which go a long way in the composition of a soldier. He is, as a rule, healthy, well-built, active, easily led, not easily overcome by hardship. Moreover,

he is intelligent, docile, and, though wanting in dash, not wanting in a certain fearlessness in the presence of danger. I remember being much struck, during the great fire at Abdin Palace in the summer of 1891, by the extraordinary coolness with which certain of the native firemen stuck to their posts under the most imminent danger of being crushed by the roofs and walls which were tumbling in on all sides of them. It is the same quality which has on various occasions rendered the Egyptian soldier steady and calm under a harassing fire, sufficient to have shaken the nerves of troops who, at a charge or hand-to-hand fight, might be much better than he is. You may call it insensibility to danger if you like, and not true courage. But, call it what you will, it is an extremely valuable quality in war.

An officer of my acquaintance, who is a perfectly impartial critic, and who has had many opportunities of seeing the fellahin fight, declares that behind defences they can be made as good as any troops in the world, while even in the open, if they have only confidence in their leaders, they are fair average soldiers. The fact is, that good leadership is simply everything with Egyptians. The fellah has little individuality or initiative in the field. But he is capable of showing plenty of courage under officers whom he believes in. Witness the various instances—such as the defence of El Obeid, of Senaar, of Kassala, and, above all, of Sinkat—in which soldiers even of the old army, being for a wonder ably commanded, displayed not only a stubborn power of resistance, but daring courage in attack. It is true that the forces engaged on those occasions were not entirely



composed of fellahin. But there were many native Egyptians amongst them.

How was it that men, capable of such courage, had yet become a bye-word for cowardice? Why would they run away from a mere handful of half-naked Arabs armed with spears, when they had only to stand still and shoot in order to be perfectly safe? The answer must be sought in the treatment to which they had previously been subjected. The fellah, more than most men, requires training to make him a fighter, and he had not had it. More than most men, he is easy to demoralize by bad management, and he had had nothing else. On the one hand, he was never properly taught his business; and, on the other, he was exposed to an amount of degrading ill-usage which would have knocked the manliness out of a Viking. His officers, a miscellaneous crowd, selected on no principle and promoted for anything but merit, were quite unable to keep up real discipline; but, at the same time, they banged their men about in the most cruel and disheartening manner.

The rank and file were wretchedly paid, and the little pay they were entitled to was often intercepted. The officers, who, to do them justice, found their own salary constantly in arrear, recouped themselves by taking the money which ought to have provided the soldiers with food and clothing. There were no sort of arrangements for the comfort of the men. The barracks were filthy beyond description. Provision for the sick and wounded simply did not exist. And, worst of all perhaps, although there were laws regulating the length of military service, they were, like most other laws in those days of stupid anarchy, completely disregarded. The recruit never

knew, when taken from his village, for how many years he might not be kept with the colours. Moreover, he might be sent to the Sudan, which was equivalent to a sentence of perpetual exile, if not of death. No wonder that the conscripts had to be led away in chains, under the blows of the kurbash, and amidst precisely the same violent exhibitions of grief on the part of their relations as usually attend a funeral. No wonder that large numbers of the population were, even in childhood, maimed or blinded, in order that they might escape the terrible fate of having to serve their country. Under such circumstances, what could be more unreasonable than to complain of a want of spirit in the Egyptian soldier? No ingenuity could have devised a system more likely, more certain, to destroy the spirit of any man.

Plainly the first thing to do was to reverse all this. And it was reversed. The conscription of an army of six thousand men—the number originally fixed by Lord Dufferin—was not a great tax upon a population of six millions, and the men were soon got together. Once enrolled, they found themselves properly fed, clothed, housed. Discipline was strict, but as long as they conducted themselves well, they were absolutely safe from oppression. Their pay was reasonable in amount, and it was never stopped except for misconduct. They were looked after when ill. Indeed, one of the first things which inspired respect and confidence on the part of the soldier in his new officers, was the fearless devotion which some of the latter showed in trying to save the lives of their subordinates during the cholera. The idea of a well-paid officer, who was, of course, expected to think

first of his own life and comfort, not only gratuitously exposing himself to danger, but undertaking the most loathsome duties, in order to wrestle with death for the lives of a set of poor peasants, was a new idea to the Egyptian mind. A very great impression was likewise made by the fact that the conscripts were now not only entitled to leave, but regularly allowed to take it. The reappearance of the fellah soldier in his native village, after an absence of a year in barracks—not crawling back, mutilated or smitten by some fatal disease, but simply walking in as a visitor, healthy, well-dressed, and with some money in his pocket—was like the vision of a man risen from the dead.

Having thus rapidly won the confidence of their men, the new officers had not much difficulty in knocking them into fair military shape. Here the fellah's quickness, submissiveness, and positive fondness for drill were of the greatest assistance. It is an amusing proof of this predilection, that the soldiers had actually to be prevented from practising their drill in their leisure hours. Not only would a non-commissioned officer get hold of a squad on his own account, whenever an opportunity offered, but it was a common sight to come across a private drilling three or four of his comrades. Within three months of its formation the new army already made a creditable show on parade. Its first recorded review took place on March 31, 1883, and on that occasion its appearance called forth the praises of independent military critics who were present on the ground.

Troops may look well on parade after a few months' drill, and such a smart appearance is of good augury for

the future. Yet no man in his senses would dream that so short a time could suffice to make them thorough soldiers, still less to create that very complicated piece of machinery, a fully organized army. To do this is a work of years. But years were in this instance not granted for the completion of the machine before the first serious strain was put upon it. When the new troops were enlisted, it was never contemplated that they should have anything to do with the Sudan. The garrisons already on the spot, reinforced by the remnants of Arabi's beaten army and by some fresh irregular levies, might, it was considered, be left to deal with any trouble in that quarter. Indeed at that time nobody thought much about the Sudan. But within a year nobody thought much about anything else. The new army had only been some eighteen months under arms when it was called upon to take its share in the effort to stem the rising tide of Mahdism, which had already covered the greater part of the Sudan, and was threatening to cover Egypt. It was, indeed, decided not to use any portion of the new troops for the relief of Tokar at the time of General Baker's ill-starred expedition in the winter of 1883. But when in the following summer a British force under Lord Wolseley was sent up the Nile to rescue Gordon and the garrisons, Sir Evelyn Wood claimed for his young soldiers the right to take part in the work ; and his claim was, after some hesitation, most wisely conceded.

During Lord Wolseley's expedition the Egyptian troops were principally engaged in guarding the long line of communications which extended from Assiut to Korti. In the arduous and often risky work of transport, when

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the boats containing men and stores had to be dragged for miles against a strong current, or through dangerous rapids, they showed all their best qualities of zeal, obedience, and endurance. Moreover small detachments, which were actually under fire at Abu Klea and at Kirbekan, behaved with a steadiness which justified the opinion of those who, like Sir Evelyn Wood, believed that a larger share of the actual fighting might safely have been entrusted to the Egyptians.

Whatever grievance there may have been on this score was very soon to be removed. Sir Evelyn Wood, who retired from the position of Sirdar in April, 1885, was not himself destined to lead to victory the troops whom he had trained, and in whose training he had rendered invaluable services, which were perhaps not fully appreciated until after his departure. But when the British army was withdrawn from Dongola in the summer of 1885, a Frontier Field Force was formed under Major-General Grenfell, the new Sirdar, and was composed in about equal numbers of British and Egyptians. And now the *morale* of the latter was to be put to really severe tests. In the skirmish of Mograkeh, where two hundred of them held a fort against a vastly superior number of dervishes, and in the severe engagement at Ginnis on December 30, 1885, which discomfited the Mahdists in their first serious move upon the frontier of Egypt, the Egyptian soldiers were exposed to the full brunt of battle. It is true, that at Ginnis the Frontier Field Force was powerfully reinforced by British troops brought up on purpose to deal a staggering blow to the overweening enemy, still flushed with the exultation of their great victory at Khartum. The chief command

was in the hands of Lieut.-General Stephenson, then at the head of the British Army of Occupation. But, for all that, the Egyptians took a substantial part in the fight, and their gallant conduct, coming at a moment when Great Britain was anxiously striving to reduce the number of her troops in Egypt, doubtless contributed to the decision, which was shortly afterwards arrived at, to leave the defence of the frontier in Egyptian hands.

The frontier was now fixed at Wadi Halfa, where it has practically remained to the present day; and by April, 1886, that post was confided entirely to the keeping of the Egyptian army, a British force being, however, for some time longer, stationed at Assuan, two hundred miles to the north, in case of emergencies. But this reserve was never called upon for assistance. Its numbers were gradually reduced, and by January, 1888, the last British detachment was withdrawn from that part of the country. Since that time the Egyptian army has proved itself equal to the task of protecting Egypt from the northward pressure of the Sudanese rebels. At Suakin, too, where in 1884 and 1885 such an imposing display of British military force had been considered necessary, Egyptian troops towards the close of the latter year took over the whole defence, and except for a few months in the end of 1888, when, owing to a panic at home, they were quite unnecessarily reinforced by part of the British garrison at Cairo, they have conducted it unaided ever since.

Meanwhile, the extension of the duties of the army had necessitated an increase of its numbers. If its work had been confined to maintaining internal order, and keeping in awe the restless, but really not very formidable

Bedawin on the eastern and western frontiers of Egypt—and this was all for which it was originally intended—the number of six thousand men fixed by Lord Dufferin might have sufficed. But now that it was expected to ward off, single handed, the dangerous invasion threatening from the far south, that number was evidently inadequate. At the end of 1883 the infantry still consisted of only eight battalions, recruited exclusively from the fellahin. But in May, 1884, there was raised at Suakin a 9th battalion, composed of Sudanese negroids—the first of the famous black regiments which supply the picturesque and the dashing element in the Egyptian military history of recent times. The experiment of enlisting these blacks proved a great success, and in January, 1886, another battalion of the same kind, the 10th Sudanese, was added to the army. In June of the same year came the 13th Sudanese, in December, 1887, the 11th Sudanese, and, finally, in November, 1888, the 12th Sudanese. That the 13th should come before the 11th and the 12th is a characteristically Egyptian arrangement, but the explanation lies in the fact that there were originally two new fellah regiments which bore the Nos. 11 and 12, but which were suppressed in a fit of economy, and subsequently replaced by the present 11th and 12th, who, like the 9th, 10th, and 13th, are blacks.

A word about the black soldiers. And be it observed that the term black, in this connection, is not, as it is so often, an exaggeration or a figure of speech. Not even the most sensitive Radical could object to the 9th—13th Sudanese being described as “black men,” and they themselves are rather proud than otherwise of their own hue of deepest ebony. They are not natives

of Egypt, but belong for the most part to the Shillúk and Dinka tribes, who are found on the Upper Nile, from some little distance above Khartum right away to the Equatorial Province. Others come from the west beyond Kordofan, and even from as far as Wadai and Bornu. In build they are not exactly what in northern countries we should describe as fine men. The Dinka and Shillúk are tall, but slight and narrow shouldered, with skinny arms and legs. Their lungs are delicate, and great care has to be taken with their clothing, to protect them from catching cold. The men from the western districts are shorter and thicker-set, but even they could not be called robust. But they are all of springy gait and elastic movement, as active as cats, and animated with a real love of fighting, especially of fighting the Arabs of the Sudan, their hereditary enemies and oppressors. In civilization they are far below the inhabitants of Egypt. They are indeed mere children, with the thoughtlessness, the waywardness, and the want of foresight of children. But under officers who know how to command their respect and win their affection, they have all a child's docility and devotion.

As soldiers, the blacks are the very reverse of the Egyptians. They are not quick at drill, or fond of it. What they are fond of, and what they shine in, is real battle. It is true they have little *sang froid*. They easily get excited, and are hard to hold. The difficulty is to prevent them from firing too fast or charging too soon. At Afafit one of the Sudanese battalions could only be stopped from blazing away at the enemy by their commanding officer going out of the line and passing in front of their rifles. But when it actually comes to

close quarters, to charging or receiving a charge, then they have few equals. They have a natural instinct for combat which training may improve, but which it can never beget. In this respect they are immensely superior to the fellahin.

A noticeable fact is the sort of natural *camaraderie* which seems rapidly to spring up between the blacks and Englishmen. The former very easily become attached to their British officers, and those officers, on their side, have a curious kind of fondness for the blacks, which they do not seem to feel in an equal degree for the native Egyptians. This feeling has been known to extend even to the private soldiers of our British regiments, who, on more than one occasion, have readily fraternized with the Sudanese. These grown-up children with their light-heartedness, simplicity, and unquestionable pluck, were regarded by Tommy Atkins with half-amused, half-admiring, and inoffensively patronizing affection. The friendship formed between the 79th Highlanders and the 9th Sudanese at the time of the battle of Ginnis is a pleasing case in point. The Highlanders presented their swarthy comrades with a flag which the latter carry along with their regimental colours to this day, and the 9th Sudanese have sometimes been playfully described as the "second battalion of the Cameron Highlanders." The curious thing is, that the blacks get on better with the English than they do with the Egyptians, with whom they might naturally be supposed to have so much more in common. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the Sudanese battalions would be manageable without British officers at their head. Hence it has come about that, while of the eight fellah regi-

ments only four have British colonels and majors—the others being entirely officered by natives—the five Sudanese regiments are all under British superior officers. Moreover, in view of the greater difficulty of controlling them in the field, the number of these officers attached to a black battalion is four, while in the Egyptian battalions it is only three.

The addition of this new element greatly strengthened the Egyptian army, and still constitutes its most striking feature as a fighting force. But it is not just to assume, as is sometimes done, that the native Egyptians are of small account in the composition of the army. No doubt the blacks have borne the chief brunt of attack in the majority of engagements. No doubt they are the men whom a commander would most readily pit against the reckless courage of the dervishes. Still they have not done all the work. The native Egyptians, who have fought steadily beside them in more than one critical struggle, deserve their share of the credit of victory. The truth is, that the two sets of men, with their widely different qualities, form a very strong combination for fighting purposes.

To return to the defence of the frontier. For fully three years the position of the Egyptian garrison at Wadi Halfa was a very anxious one. Wadi Halfa is a fortified camp at the northern extremity of the long desolate defile, known as the "Batn el Hagar" or "belly of stones," through which the Nile works its way in a succession of rapids, with nothing on either hand but ridge upon ridge of tumbled black rock, and beyond it the illimitable desert. At Wadi Halfa, for the first time for many miles, the valley widens out into a broad plain,

and on that plain it was wisely decided to await the enemy, as they debouched from the wilderness of rock.

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X The invasion did not take the form of that steady advance in force which was at one time expected. No doubt the Khalifa Abdullah el Taishi who, after the death of the Mahdi in the summer of 1885, had succeeded to supreme power at Khartum, always intended to send a regular army against Egypt. But fortunately he had his hands full in other directions. The tide of dervish attack at the gates of Egypt ebbed and flowed according to the fortunes of the Khalifa in his struggles with the *soi-disant* adherents of the Senussi in the west, with the Abyssinians in the east, and with the numerous rebellions on the part of his own followers, which have threatened, though they have never upset, his power. At the end of 1886, the dervishes for the first time occupied Sarras, a fort in the heart of the Batn el Hagar, some thirty miles south of Wadi Halfa. From this point they harassed the garrison of the latter place and devastated the country all round, cutting down the palm trees, which are almost its only product. Then they withdrew again for several months, but returned in greater force the following spring. After a severe blow inflicted upon them by the Wadi Halfa garrison, under Colonel Chermside, on April 27th, in a brilliant surprise, which was the first unaided victory of the Egyptian troops, the dervishes once more retired, only however to return in still larger numbers, and to establish themselves permanently at Sarras towards the end of September. And now followed a long series of desultory raids, not merely in the neighbourhood of Wadi Halfa, but at many points between that place and Assuan, raids which spread terror far and wide

among the wretched villagers. The Egyptian troops, though doing their best both by posts established along the river and by gunboats cruising up and down it, found it very difficult to restrain or to punish these forays. Many skirmishes took place, some trifling, others desperate and bloody, like the midnight capture and recapture of the fort of Khor Mussa on August 29, 1888. But though the defence gradually got the better of the attack, especially after the creation of the military Frontier Province under Colonel Wodehouse as governor, nothing decisive occurred. It was in this tedious guerilla warfare that the fighting qualities of the Egyptian army were developed.

Still the expected invasion did not come. It was not till the summer of 1889 that the dervish leader, Wad el Nejumi, goaded by the reproaches of his jealous master, at last made that desperate rush to reach Egypt which he had so long contemplated, but for which he never succeeded in collecting an adequate force. The attempt was a hopeless one from the first. To lead an army of five thousand fighting men, swollen by a crowd of women, children, and camp followers to upwards of twice that number, with inadequate provisions and means of transport, for more than a hundred miles across a waterless desert, only to fight a battle at the end, was a venture which could not possibly succeed against the forces which Egypt now disposed of for purposes of defence. Yet such was the power of Wad el Nejumi's personality, that the bulk of his soldiers followed him with enthusiasm even on this fatal enterprise.

Wad el Nejumi, indeed, is the most heroic figure among all the Arab chieftains of the Sudan war—the

Gordon of Mahdism. It was he who overthrew Hicks. It was he who led the final attack upon Khartum. And he, in the eyes of all the Faithful, was destined to plant the standard of the true Mahdi on the citadel of Cairo. Wild as the dream was, there is no saying that, if he had only had the old Egyptian army to deal with, it might not have been realized.

Nejumi's plan was to avoid Wadi Halfa, by starting from a point on the western Nile bank opposite Sarras, and striking straight across the desert to Bimban, a place on the river about twenty-five miles north of Assuan. At Bimban he was led to believe that a number of Egyptian rebels would flock to his standard. Till then it was not his intention to offer battle, and he accordingly kept at some little distance from the river, which lay on his right. At the same time he doubtless counted on being able to obtain some provisions, and, above all, water, from the villages along the bank. But here he miscalculated. A flying column, consisting of about half of the Wadi Halfa garrison, under Colonel Wodehouse, dogged his march and kept heading him from the river. When a strong detachment of his army, disobeying his orders, made a push to reach the Nile, they were, after a long day's rough-and-tumble fighting, totally defeated at Argin by Colonel Wodehouse's troops. Still Nejumi pushed resolutely on, despite diminished numbers, despite losses from death and desertion, and the necessity of killing most of the transport animals for want of other food. And the majority of the dervish army never flinched or wavered from their leader. But General Grenfell was now hurrying down from the north with strong reinforcements, and, joining

hands with Colonel Wodehouse, he threw himself across Nejumi's line of march at Toski, on August 3rd, and compelled the Arab leader to give battle.

The dervishes rushed to the attack with their usual splendid bravery; but their end was annihilation. Nejumi himself, almost all his principal captains, and nearly half of his fighting men, were killed. The rest were scattered to the winds, while many died in the attempt to retrace their steps through the arid wilderness. Thus ended one of the most madly daring enterprises in the whole romantic history of the Sudan war. No one can fail to feel a certain admiration for the courage and determination of Nejumi, or for the followers who stuck to him through every trial, and would have sold their lives willingly to preserve his. There is no more touching incident in the history of barbarian warfare than the picture of those stubborn warriors, whom no danger could appal and no hardship subjugate, bursting into tears over the dead body of the chieftain who had led them through intolerable sufferings to certain defeat.

The victory of Toski has had far-reaching consequences. For the two years previous to it the country between Wadi Halfa and Assuan was utterly unsafe. No one ever knew, when and where a body of marauding Arabs might not swoop down upon the river bank. The people lived in terror of their lives. The garrisons were constantly on the alert. Now all this region is nearly as quiet as Lower Egypt. A considerable number of tourists go every winter to Wadi Halfa, and Mr. Cook conducts them with an easy mind. A dervish in those parts has become almost as rare a sight as a crocodile.

And even for some little distance beyond Wadi Halfa there is a great change. An Egyptian outpost now holds Sarras, and the Egyptian patrols sweep the country for many miles south of it, and seldom see an enemy. The inhabitants, who had all fled before the advance of the dervishes, are gradually returning. On the road between Wadi Halfa and Sarras last winter I saw a number of families, their camels laden with simple domestic utensils or bags of seed, slowly wending their way back to their long-deserted homes.

And what Toski did for the southern frontier, the engagement at Afait in the spring of 1891 has done for the Red Sea Littoral, and for the important district depending on Suakin. Up to the time of that engagement Suakin had for years been practically beleaguered. The siege was carried on with more or less vigour. On one occasion, at the end of 1888, the enemy grew so troublesome, and entrenched themselves so close to the walls of the town, that a large force of Egyptian and British troops were obliged to turn them out at the point of the bayonet. But whether they were threatening Suakin itself or simply harrying the surrounding country, the dervishes under Osman Digna, who has been the life and soul of the rebellion in this region, were really masters of the situation. The Egyptian governor of the Red Sea Littoral was governor within the walls of Suakin, and no further. And the reason was that the enemy always had a comfortable base of operations in the fertile delta of Tokar. Over and over again the military authorities pointed out that, unless this base were captured, Suakin would continue in a state of siege; whereas, if Tokar were once occupied by Egyptian troops, the whole

country for many miles round would be easily restored to tranquillity and to the sovereignty of the Khedive. But so rooted was the objection in England to anything like a fresh forward movement in any portion of the Sudan, that it took several years to obtain the consent of the British Government to an advance upon Tokar.

When that advance was, at length, undertaken, there ensued one short, sharp, and, for perhaps ten minutes, doubtful engagement. But the steadiness of the Egyptian soldiers and the conspicuous gallantry and resource of one or two of the field officers won the day. Osman Digna suffered a defeat from which he should never recover, and in this portion of the Sudan also there reigns for the present an almost perfect peace, such as has not been known there for nearly ten years.*

I have passed rapidly over the exploits of the Egyptian army. The limits of my space would not allow me to dilate on them, even if I believed more than I do in military history written by civilians. Of greater importance to my subject than the achievements of the army in the past is the question of its trustworthiness and efficiency to carry out, in the present and the future, the objects for which it is maintained. Can it, we may ask, be relied upon to keep the peace within the borders of Egypt, and to protect those borders from attack?

Before proceeding to answer these questions, let me briefly state the present strength of the army. On May 1, 1892, it consisted of 14 battalions of infantry (eight Egyptian, five Sudanese, and one dépôt battalion,

* Since these words were written, Osman Digna has reappeared, but the small success attending his latest raid shows how helpless he is without his old base at Tokar.

amounting in all to nearly 10,000 men), 10 troops of cavalry (about 800 men), three field batteries and one garrison battalion (about 900 men), one camel corps (300 men), besides staff, military police, medical corps, engineers, transport companies, and so forth. There were 18 field guns, and the total number of guns of position and machine guns was 160. The full establishment was 12,902 officers and men; the actual numbers were 12,547. There has been no material change since then, but I think a small increase is contemplated for next year. This army, it may be added, costs, roughly speaking, nearly half a million of money, or something less than £40 a man. That is a very different sum from the £130,000 which a high authority estimated eight years ago to be the possible limit of Egypt's military expenditure. But at that time, it must be remembered, the defence of the country was still largely in the hands of British troops.

As far as internal order is concerned, this force would appear amply sufficient. With mere local disturbances or with trouble caused by the Bedawin—the two contingencies which Lord Dufferin contemplated—it is more than able to cope. On the other hand, any general rising, like that of 1882, is, under present conditions, hardly conceivable. The Arabist rebellion, it will be remembered, had its origin in the discontent of the army. But the army is now, save for a certain amount of grumbling among the native officers, perfectly contented. The great body of the peasantry only took active part with Arabi tardily and after great incitement, nor had they ever much heart for the business. But at that time their condition was infinitely worse than it is

nowadays. An all-round revolt of the fellahin, in their present state of comparative ease and freedom, is not to be thought of. What might happen, if the conditions which prevailed in the latter days of Ismail were to return, if the administration were once more to get thoroughly out of hand, and, as a consequence, the needs of the people were neglected and their burdens increased, it is impossible to predict. But there is no need at present to contemplate any such relapse into misgovernment.

There remains the question of defence against external enemies, a question enormously simplified by the fact that there is in reality only one frontier to be defended. On the north and east, along the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Suez, Egypt is no doubt peculiarly liable to maritime attack, while at the Isthmus she might also be invaded by land, as she has been on more than one memorable occasion in her past history. But on these sides Egypt is, to-day, protected by diplomacy, and if diplomacy did not protect her, it is perfectly certain that no force raised within her own borders ever could. Against a naval invasion by one of the Great Powers, or against a powerful military expedition, European or Turkish, entering by the Isthmus of Suez, no Egyptian army which can be reasonably contemplated would be an effective protection. But if the northern and eastern frontiers can for all practical purposes be left out of account, so can the western. The vast extent of the Libyan Desert puts an invasion of considerable proportions on that side, unless supported from the sea, out of the question.

The rôle of the Egyptian army is thus reduced to

the duty of defending Egypt from the south. And here again the problem is of remarkable simplicity. There is only one road of approach from the south practicable for a large army, and that road is narrow and easily defended. I mean the Nile Valley. Moreover, Egypt has, on the south-east, the great outlying fortress of Suakin. This position is important, not only as deterring an enemy from a possible, though not easily practicable, advance along the Red Sea to Kosseir, whence he might strike across the desert to Kena, but as commanding the route from Berber, the great outlet for the trade of the Sudan. But when you have once garrisoned Suakin, and stationed an adequate force in the Nile Valley, your scheme of defence is completed.

How entirely the idea, that the Egyptian army is wanted only for external defence, and for external defence on one side, has now been generally accepted, may be seen from the present distribution of the Egyptian forces. When Lord Dufferin contemplated his eight battalions, he stationed them in imagination as follows: three in Cairo, one in Alexandria, and four distributed in other parts of Lower Egypt and Nubia; the vague term "Nubia" meaning, I suppose, in this instance, the country between Assuan and Halfa. Thus half at least of the whole army, and possibly more, would have been in Lower Egypt. Its actual distribution to-day is as follows: On the Nile frontier (Assuan, Korosko, Wadi Halfa, and Sarra), seven battalions; at Suakin, three battalions (including half a battalion at Tokar); at Cairo and Alexandria, three battalions. Thus nearly three-fourths of the infantry (including all the black troops) are at the two southern points of defence—Suakin and

the Nile frontier—while fully half are stationed at the latter. And the other arms are distributed in very much the same proportion. The total numbers are: Frontier, six thousand men; Suakin, two thousand six hundred; Cairo and Alexandria, four thousand. But then the four thousand men at Cairo and Alexandria include the depôt battalion, the head-quarter staff, and other central establishments. The actual fighting force in all Lower Egypt is less than three thousand men.

There can be no doubt that, as long as the present purely defensive policy is maintained, the numbers of men stationed on the frontier and at Suakin—men now thoroughly trained, encouraged by past successes, and full of confidence in themselves and their commanders—are more than a match for any enemy who is at all likely to attack them. The insurrectionary movement in the Sudan, whatever its strength may still be within certain limits, is, as an expansive and aggressive force, decidedly on the decline. There is very little probability of another invasion similar to Nejumi's, and still less of its being commanded by another leader like Nejumi. But with an invasion on that scale, even if it came, the Egyptian army at its present strength is perfectly competent to deal

There remains a more interesting and a more thorny question, a question continually agitated in Egypt, and to which, however unpopular may be any reference to the subject at present, Englishmen cannot permanently close their eyes. I refer to the re-occupation of the Sudan, or a part of the Sudan. There is probably no point in connection with the much misunderstood problem of Egypt, about which public opinion in this country is

enveloped in a deeper cloud of prejudice. Nothing, indeed, could be more natural than the weariness and disgust which came over British feeling as a consequence of the wasted heroism and useless slaughter of the years 1884-5. That attitude of mind fully explains the sense of relief—I might almost say the enthusiasm, with which the decision to withdraw altogether was, at the time, generally welcomed. There were a number of people who even seemed to persuade themselves that, in retiring, and compelling Egypt to retire, from the Sudan, we were performing a peculiarly humane, generous, and Christian act. In reality it is difficult to imagine a subject less suited for moral self-congratulation.

Personally I am convinced, that not only the original decision to abandon the Sudan at the end of 1883, but even the withdrawal of the British troops from Dongola after the Nile expedition in 1885, was fully justified by the circumstances of the case. The defence of both these decisions should, however, be based, not upon their moral loftiness, but upon their material necessity. Great Britain had other matters to attend to, far more urgent than crusading in the Sudan. Without Great Britain, Egypt was much too weak to attempt to hold that country. The effort might have ruined her, but it could have done no possible good to the revolted provinces. Still, while admitting the stern necessity of retreat, and while admiring the sagacity which recognized and the determination which executed it, we must surely feel that that necessity was, from the point of view of humanity, deeply regrettable. It is not a pleasant reflection that the former dominions of Egypt in the Sudan are perhaps the only portion of the world where

civilization has, during the last fifteen years, distinctly retrograded—the one region deliberately given back to barbarism. And it is painful to think that this dark page in Egyptian history belongs to that chapter of it which records the fortunes of Egypt while under the influence of Great Britain.

Fifteen years ago it was as safe to go to Khartum, and even five hundred miles further up the Nile Valley, as it was to go to Wadi Halfa and Sarras. Between Alexandria and Sarras there is perfect security still, but south of Sarras, and thence onward to the Equator, there is now no security whatever. No stranger, certainly no Christian stranger, could be sure of his life for a single day. I do not suppose there is another point in all the world where the line of demarcation between civilization and the most savage barbarism is more sharply marked, and that line is drawn some thousand miles further back than it was in the time of Ismail Pasha.

No doubt the government which existed in the Sudan in Ismail's time was, for the most part, detestably bad, but so was the government of Egypt itself, and for very much the same reasons. In the one country as in the other, order was kept and life was safe; in the one as in the other, the bulk of the population were cruelly oppressed. But then precisely the same influences, which have reformed the government of Egypt, would have sufficed to reform the government of the Sudan. And bad as the old government of the Sudan was, it now appears mild and beneficent by comparison with the savage tyranny which has succeeded it. Frightful, indeed almost incredible, are the ravages which war, pestilence, and famine, in their most hideous forms, have

wrought during the past ten years in the Upper Valley of the Nile. It is estimated that more than half of the population have perished. The true features of the reign of terror at present established in the Sudan, its cruelty, its bloodthirstiness and its lust—have lately been revealed to us by an eye-witness of long experience and unquestionable veracity. The reminiscences of Father Ohrwalder, the Austrian priest who only this year effected so miraculous an escape from his ten years' captivity in that country, are now before the public. It is impossible for any one to read the story without a shudder, difficult for an Englishman to read it without a sense of shame.

So far, then, from there being any obligations of honour or humanity to justify the abandonment of the Sudan, honour and humanity alike point to the overthrow of the bloody despotism of the Khalifa, as soon as it can be achieved without putting too great a strain on the resources of Egypt. No doubt that time has not yet come. If the Egyptian Government were to be left to itself to-morrow, the recovery of the Sudan is the first thing it would attempt. In that case it would probably fail, and it would certainly involve Egypt in fresh financial difficulties, which might be fatal to her just reviving prosperity. But while an immediate, perhaps even an early advance upon the Sudan is unadvisable, there can be no doubt that such a movement is not only in the long run inevitable, but would, if wisely timed and gradually executed, be productive of most desirable results.

For it must not be forgotten that, apart from all questions of sentiment, Egypt has material interests in extending her dominions towards the south, the im-

portance of which cannot be gainsaid. It is not only a question of trade, though the trade in old times was considerable, and would assume large and constantly increasing proportions when order had been restored for a few years. It is a question of security, and the sense of security. There can be no permanent rest for Egypt, as long as a reign of explosive barbarism still prevails from Suakin to Darfur, and from Wadi Halfa to Wadelai. The offensive power of that barbarism may wax or wane—it is certainly on the wane at present—but it is always a potential source of incalculable mischiefs. However fireproof a man's own walls, he can hardly be expected to sleep quietly with a fire permanently blazing or smouldering in the neighbouring house.

Moreover, the control of the Nile, at least up to a point well above the junction of its two great branches, possesses a quite peculiar importance for Egypt. The absence of the old daily reports from Khartum as to the height of the river during the period of its rise is of itself, as any irrigation engineer will tell you, a very serious disadvantage to the country. But there is a graver anxiety behind. The savages of the Sudan may never themselves possess sufficient engineering skill to play tricks with the Nile, but for all that it is an uncomfortable thought that the regular supply of water by the great river, which is to Egypt not a question of convenience and prosperity but actually of life, must always be exposed to some risk, as long as the upper reaches of that river are not under Egyptian control.

Who can say what might happen, if some day a civilized Power, or a Power commanding civilized skill, were to undertake great engineering works on the Upper

Nile, and to divert for the artificial irrigation of that region the water which is essential for the artificial irrigation of Egypt? Such a contingency may seem very remote. I admit that it is very improbable. But before it is laughed out of court, let us consider what would be the feelings of the inhabitants of any ordinary country, our own for instance, if there were even a remote possibility that the annual rainfall could be materially altered by the action of a foreign Power. Egypt is never likely to feel at ease, the Egyptian Question can never be regarded as even approximately settled, until order is re-established along the Nile Valley to at least a considerable distance beyond Khartum.

— And it must not be imagined that the reconquest of the Nile basin will necessarily involve a series of campaigns at all comparable in severity to those which have given the name of the Sudan so ominous a sound in British ears. No doubt the power of the Khalifa will not be upset without at least one severe tussle. It is true that he is now heartily loathed throughout the greater part of the country. His authority is maintained by the great tribe of the Baggara—including the blacks, whom they have enrolled under their standard—and by them alone. But, on the other hand, a well-considered policy of military centralization—for Abdullah El-Taishi is a statesman after his own fashion—has put the Baggara and their black auxiliaries in possession of all the guns and all the ammunition in the whole of the Sudan. Their tyranny over the other tribes has been a cruel and a destructive one, and it has ended in leaving them the only effective military force. At and around Omdurman, which has taken the place of

Khartum as the capital of the Sudan, is a powerful army which, though it may be unable to repel attacks upon the more distant provinces of the Khalifa's dominions, would certainly oppose a very formidable resistance to any enemy advancing upon his head-quarters.

Fortunately, however, there would be no necessity for Egypt, even if she did attempt the recovery of the Sudan, to grapple at once with the central power of the Khalifa. What would almost certainly be done, on any prudent plan of proceeding, would be, in the first place, to reoccupy Dongola, with or without a simultaneous advance on Abu Hamed. It is quite possible that, with the exercise of a certain amount of diplomacy, the province of Dongola might be recovered without firing a shot. The Danagla and the great warlike tribe of the Jaalin, who lie to the south of them, were the heart and soul of the original rebellion. The Madhi himself was of Dongolesse extraction. Wad el Nejumi was a Jaali. But since the leadership of the movement has passed entirely into the hands of the Baggara, and has been abused by them for purposes of self-aggrandisement, the Danagla and the Jaalin are bitterly disaffected. They may hate the Egyptians, but by this time they certainly hate the Baggara more. Were an advance to be made in the first instance only as far as Dongola, it is probable that the inhabitants would content themselves with a mere show of resistance, while it would be a dangerous matter for the Khalifa to send any large number of his myrmidons several hundred miles from their head-quarters, to resist the invading army in a country where, if beaten, they might have the whole population rising against them.

Once established at Dongola, and possibly at Abu Hamed, the Egyptians would not only have recovered a fertile province, which even in old days easily paid its expenses, and which is well capable of supporting an army. They would also occupy inside the Sudan a position certain to form a rallying point for all the neighbouring tribes that were hostile to the existing tyranny. The prestige of the Khalifa and his Baggara would be greatly impaired by the presence of an Egyptian force within their dominions. Every year there would be more desertion from them to the side of the invaders. And then two alternatives would present themselves to the Khalifa. He must either keep quiet in his own central position and see the outlying provinces fall away from him one after the other, or he must advance to expel the Egyptians from Dongola. If he advanced, he would be likely to meet with the fate which befell Nejumi at Toski. If he did not, it would be for Egypt to choose her own moment for attacking him and striking the decisive blow. She would be in the very advantageous position of being able to postpone her action until she felt absolutely confident that she could afford the necessary force.

Should the policy of recovering the Sudan by the gradual method be ultimately adopted, it would not, with good management, involve any intolerable drain on the finances of Egypt. She need not at any given time undertake more than she could at that time afford. It is, no doubt, improbable that any general would care to attempt the advance on Dongola with a smaller force than four or five thousand men, though, as a matter of fact, so large an army might not be needed. But

Dongola once occupied, the large garrison now maintained at Wadi Halfa would not be required at that place; and, though some allowance must be made for the necessity of guarding a longer line of communications, the occupation of Dongola would hardly involve a permanent addition of as much as four or five thousand men to the Egyptian army. What additional forces a yet further advance might necessitate, it is vain at this moment, while so many of the circumstances are still conjectural, even to attempt to determine. But, considering the economy of military strength which might be effected in many directions, if the one great danger to Egypt's existence—a hostile barbarous power in the central Sudan—were overcome, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that an army of twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand men would permanently suffice to defend Egypt and the Nile basin, not only up to Khartum, but as far as Fashoda on the White Nile and Sennar on the Blue Nile. And this, together with Kassala, is all that we need at present contemplate, perhaps all that Egypt may ever require. Were she infinitely stronger than she is, great doubt might still be felt as to the wisdom of her seeking to re-establish a straggling empire over the more distant parts of Kordofan, to say nothing of Darfur, the Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria.

I know that there may be strong opposition to the reconquest of any portion of the Sudan. It will be argued that, if even in old days that country never paid its expenses, Egypt can certainly no longer afford the luxury of so costly a dependency. But the reason why the Sudan was formerly so ruinous to Egypt is, firstly, because she tried to hold too much of it; secondly,



because she filled it with a needless swarm of officials, civil and military; and, thirdly, because those officials were utterly bad. If the new Egyptian dominion in the Sudan were to be confined to the Nile basin; if the Government were to content itself with maintaining peace, protecting trade, and keeping a very light hand upon the tribes, left in all their internal affairs to the control of their own chiefs and customs; if, finally, the same securities for honest administration were taken in the Sudan that are now taken in Egypt, there is no reason why the whole of the necessary country should not be governed without loss, and, at the same time, without crushing and irritating the people by excessive taxation. The Sudan could easily support the cost of a moderate garrison, and of a very simple civil administration, while the indirect gain to Egypt from its recovery would be enormous.

There is one possibility bearing on this subject, which, however doubtful and remote, it may be worth while to glance at. British influence is at the present moment predominant at the head waters of the Nile. It may be that, failing to recognize the great importance of Uganda,* we shall abandon our hold on that region. But, if we maintain it, our position there is likely to have important consequences for the future of the Sudan. Immediately to the north of Uganda, and thence onward to the southern limit of the Khalifa's dominions, is a country as rich in first-rate fighting material as any in the world. Tribes of the same character as those who in the Sudanese battalions form the backbone of the

* This passage was written before the recent public controversy on the Uganda Question.

Egyptian army, or who, under the name of "Gehadía," are so formidable an element in the Khalifa's military strength, will be within the reach and at the disposal of any civilized Power, which has once firmly established itself on the Nyanza Lakes. And, on the other hand, Great Britain is particularly rich in the class of men who can train, control and lead troops, such as these tribes would supply. The negroids of the southern Sudan are a strange mixture of courage and helplessness. Left to themselves, they are powerless. Their backward intelligence, their inability to combine, and their want of leaders have made them at all times an easy prey to the Arab slave raiders, who in mere valour are by no means their superiors. But they will fight splendidly under any leaders who have the gift and habit of command. It has been proved that they make excellent soldiers with British officers at their head. It is certain that, given the choice, they would rather serve any one than the Baggara Arabs. Some of the best blacks in the Egyptian army are deserters from the other side.

It is thus not impossible that the ultimate fall of the Baggara tyranny may be due to concurrent if not combined pressure from the south and from the north. In that case, the time may not be so far distant, when order will be restored throughout the whole of the Sudan, its childlike races relieved from the oppression under which they have suffered for centuries, and the slave-trade finally extinguished in that part of Africa. But, attractive as such a vision is, the possibility of Egypt being assisted, directly or indirectly, in her advance upon the Sudan, by a corresponding movement from the south, is evidently not a thing to be counted upon. And even

without such aid she ought ultimately to be able, in the manner already indicated, to recover so much of the Upper Nile valley as is of absolute importance to her.

I have been looking far ahead. Let me repeat that, fair as I believe the prospects of Egypt in the direction of the Sudan to be, they might easily be spoiled by excessive haste. Time fights on her side. Every year her finances are growing better able to stand the strain of an important military expedition. Every year her army becomes better organized, more consolidated, more confident in itself. Every year the tyranny of the Khalifa becomes more intolerable, while he himself, whose strong personality alone makes the continuance of that tyranny possible, is one step nearer the grave, to which care and debauchery are rapidly hurrying him. Egypt can afford to wait, though, for the sake of humanity, we may hope that she will not have to wait very long.

But, of course, when I speak of Egypt being able to wait, of time fighting on her side, of her army growing stronger as the years go on, I mean the army as at present constituted, the army with British direction at its head, and with a certain number of British officers. The presence of the British officers has been the essence of the reorganization of the Egyptian army so far. Were that influence to disappear, I do not say the army would collapse (though I have my own opinions on the subject), but I do say that it would be absolutely impossible to predict anything with regard to it. You could no longer make any calculation as to the future, based upon the immediate past, because you would have struck out of the calculation precisely that factor which in the immediate past has been the most important.

I am not one of those who hold that everything, that has been done in Egypt during the past ten years, is due to Englishmen. I am the first to recognize the very important part which has been played in the revival of the country by natives and other Europeans. I do not believe that the indefinite continuance of British control in its present form is essential to the ultimate welfare of Egypt. I see great improvement in the self-governing capacity of its inhabitants, and I look forward to still greater improvement in the same direction. But optimist and Egyptian as I am, I cannot conceal from myself or from my readers, that the command of the army is one of the last things that it will be safe to hand over entirely to native management. No doubt the quality of the native officers is much improved. As juniors they are often excellent, and even in the command of regiments some of them have proved a success. But, can any one say that, taken all round, they as yet possess that initiative and that sense of responsibility which would justify their being entrusted with the exclusive direction of affairs? Have they sufficient confidence in themselves, or would they, unsupported, inspire sufficient confidence in their men? I do not believe that any honest man, acquainted with the facts, could answer these questions with a confident affirmative.

It was a fatal flaw in the Wolff Convention, which, in other respects, had many good points, that it bargained for the cessation of British control over the Egyptian army within two years after the withdrawal of the British troops from the country. The only thing to have made the withdrawal of the British troops reasonably safe would have been to maintain for a long period

the British direction of the native troops. If our dealing with the army has been perhaps the most conspicuous success in the whole of our labours for the reorganization of Egypt, it must be remembered that this is the field in which we have had the most absolutely free hand. Nobody thought of interfering with Sir Evelyn Wood or Sir Francis Grenfell. It is not probable that any one will interfere with the new Sirdar, General Kitchener, who succeeded Sir Francis last April. But the more absolute British control has been, the more serious are likely to be the consequences of its withdrawal.

Do not let me be supposed to suggest that we must abandon the hope of ultimately training a sufficient number of natives competent to fill positions of command. Quite the contrary. In making soldiers we have had a splendid success. To crown the work, we ought to end by making officers. Nor can there be the smallest doubt that the British heads of the army recognize this duty and do their best to accomplish it. But it is another question whether they are quite bold enough in making the necessary experiments. If the native officers are still wanting in initiative and self-reliance, there seems nothing for it but to multiply their opportunities of practising these qualities. To do so would probably lead to some failures, and there certainly was a time when affairs were so critical that nothing whatever could be risked. But that is not quite the case to-day. The present, if any, is the moment for trying gradually to increase the number of native officers in responsible positions. When the army was first formed, there were twenty-seven British officers to six thousand men. To-day there are seventy-six British officers to twelve

thousand five hundred men, and there are about forty British non-commissioned officers besides. The proportion, instead of diminishing, has increased. The heavy duties, suddenly thrown on the young army at a most critical moment, explain and justify that increase; but it certainly would seem that, in the interests of both British and Egyptians, it is not desirable to go much further in this direction.

I have referred already to the existence of a certain covert discontent among the native officers, on account of the slowness of promotion in the higher grades. And this is perfectly natural. The commanders of companies to-day include a great number of young men who have come into the army since 1882, having passed through the Military School. The whole period of their service has been under the English system. We have given them a thorough training, and, though we may know that many of them suffer from some want of character which unfits them for further advancement, it cannot be supposed that they can see with equanimity a number of young English subalterns passed over their heads, to occupy at once the positions of majors. Without taking at all an alarmist view of such grumbling—for after all what army in the world is not full of complaints about the slowness of promotion?—it is evidently desirable to remove any reasonable grounds for it, which may exist. From every point of view it would be a wise policy to increase as soon as possible the number of native officers advanced to the higher posts, always provided that British control at head-quarters remains strong enough to ensure promotions being made rigidly by merit, as without this control they certainly would not be.

✓ There is another reason, of more importance perhaps than the fear of native discontent, which should weigh against the multiplication of British officers in the army. Here, as elsewhere in the Egyptian service, what is essential to the success of British influence, is not the quantity of Englishmen but their quality. There is no point in the whole wide sphere of our power where it is more important to select most carefully the Englishmen whom you employ. And of course, if you are going in for picked men, you handicap yourself by demanding large numbers.

The Egyptian army has in the course of years necessarily lost many of those Englishmen who were in it from the beginning, who had taken part in the work of its creation, and who had gained an invaluable experience of the country and the people. Fortunately there are some of that class remaining, such as the new Sirdar himself, the Adjutant-General, Colonel Rundle, the Military Governor of the Frontier, Colonel Wodehouse, and several other excellent officers. But there are also a number of young and as yet inexperienced men, and what is perhaps more serious, there is some danger of a considerable substitution of new for old officers at an early date. There is no reason to doubt that the former will in time be as much improved as their predecessors by the wonderful opportunities which the Egyptian service affords for the development of the best qualities of English soldiers. But it is not a good plan to introduce too many new hands at once, especially as it is quite impossible that they should possess for some time to come the same influence over the native officers as the old men whom they replace and whom the natives have been accustomed to obey and to look up to from the first.

Nothing indeed is more to be deprecated than a too frequent change of the British officers in the army. It is reported that the British War Office, impressed by the special efficacy of the Egyptian service for turning boys into men, desires to pass a large number of young officers through that service as quickly as possible. This plan may be very good for the English army, but it is not at all good for the Egyptian. Egypt is a very peculiar country, which it takes some time to know. Arabic is a very difficult language, which even with a serious effort—not always, I fear, made by Englishmen—it takes several years to learn. Yet a knowledge of the peculiarities of the country and people, and a good command of the colloquial language, are most important elements in the utility of Englishmen, and above all of English officers in Egypt. The men who have acquired these qualities are much too valuable to be lightly dispensed with. Of course, no one expects English officers to stay in the Egyptian army all their lives. But neither is it desirable that their passage through it should be a very hurried one. Moreover, that is not at all the desire of the officers themselves. As a rule, they grow very interested in the country and the work, and the more interested they are, the greater is their value. They like to stay, and, where they have proved themselves efficient, they should be allowed to do so as long as possible. For the maintenance of the authority of British officers, not by virtue of their numbers, but of their character, capacity, and experience, will remain, for some time longer, essential to the well-being of the army, and to the safety and repose of Egypt.